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## Bowtie Sundays

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## bowtie sunday zac brackett

Tailored suits line the closet of the double wide as Sunday morning rush comes to a close. The bow tie threatens my neck as he bends down to straighten it before we leave for church.

My father has just finished explaining to me that I could not go out with Amanda because I was only twelve and shouldn't lose my innocence so early. My jaw clenches as his hand brushes my face when he finishes.

Just one more day, and we can all go back to Mom's.

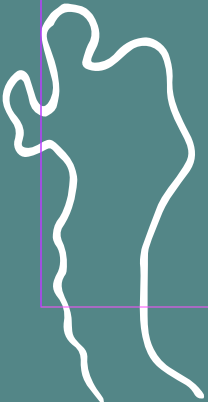
He ushers us down the hallway that creaks and smells of old linoleum. Outside, the treehouse looks disheveled in the morning fog as the 1990 Jeep Cherokee fails to start again.

"Let's all pray," my father says, putting his head down onto the cracked steering wheel that reeks of old grease and cigarettes.

My siblings and I bow our heads in succession and chant in unison to the wonderful creator of all things to make this ancient vehicle start. It does.

That's the power of prayer. It's definitely not just that it is cold and the engine needed to heat up.

The ride to church is characterized by the Farfield Four singing acapella Christian blues that my father beeps and bops to all the way while my three-year-old brother, Andrew, sticks his finger into his nose and then onto my face, laughing hysterically as I gag. Mackenzie, my little sister, got shotgun today, which is typical for Daddy's little girl.



The choir belts out "I Surrender All" as my father reaches the pulpit and welcomes everyone to another blessed day at Faith Baptist Church, where the Holy Ghost moves every service.

It's strange to me that the Holy Ghost always seems to move right at the climactic part of the service, every service. My favorite services are the ones where the Holy Ghost moves so much that my father doesn't even preach.

Sunday morning service ends and the bus services begin. Buses packed with children, some barely old enough to walk, most smelling like the underside of a trash can. The children throng to the church, thirsty for brainwashing, shitty food, and candy. Candy that helps them associate church with rewards, candy that pumps them with sugar before they get home to their suffering mothers and drug addled fathers. We all sit quietly through another lesson about how we will all go to hell if we don't accept Jesus Christ as our savior.

After all the children are back in their trailer parks and ghettos, the busses take us straight back to church where shitty lasagna is shoved into our mouths still too hot, burning my lips and the tip of my tongue, but we don't have time. It's 5:15, and church starts at 6. In his hurry, Dad spills a spot of lasagna on his pink and blue tie, turning the pink to blood red that swirls down into a pool of blue.

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Soon after, I got a smack for not eating my broccoli. Broccoli always made me sick.

The six o'clock service comes too quickly, and once again we are in the second row behind Mrs. Grant who emits the aroma of old cats and caramel candies. She hands me another piece, smiling through the gaps in her teeth. I hate the caramels, but take it anyway, slipping it to Andrew who gobbles it down, drool slipping from the corners of his mouth as he smiles up in gratitude. He wants to be held, and as he throws his arms up at me I catch a glimpse of a purple bruise right above where his diaper begins. He has got to learn to just do what Dad says. I pull on his diaper as I lift him up to hide the purple green hue that has attached itself to his skin.

"Please rise and turn in your hymnals to page 255. Join us in singing 'Jesus Saves,'" the choir leader, Mr. Fox, raises his hands as we all rise to our feet.

Have you heard the joyful sound?

The joyful sound of hundreds of people with crack head kids and credit card debt belting our lungs out for the hope of a blessing from God.

Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

Saves from the monotony of everyday life. Saves from the fear of everlasting nothingness.

Spread the tidings all around,

The tidings that God will save us from everlasting punishment that he put on us in the first place.

Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

Jesus! Save me from the father who beats the seven-year-old for not saying thank you, who tried to hide the porn late at night while mom lay crying in the bed beside me, who missed Andrew's birth because he thought that seeing a stripper grinding on him would be better than witnessing the birth of his own baby boy. Save us all from the stench of cum on his big office chair. Save us from the smiles he gives the faithful followers, shaking hands with the same right hand that jacks off to another woman and slaps the shit out of my face because I forgot to pick up my toys before going to bed.

I catch my father glaring down from the pulpit, his head haloed by the choir lights above. A scowl begins to form on his face, and I realize that I am not singing. My mouth begins to move as the fear of that pristine black leather belt forces my voice into the chorus. A smile crosses his face, and he claps his hands at Mrs. Grant who raises her arms and shouts, "Jesus Saves! Jesus Saves!"

